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AUTHOR Griffin, Emory A.
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ABSTRACT

This paper maintains that persuasive efforts in religious discourse must include a respect for the right of individuals to make free choices. Some of the unethical practices discussed are: deception and flattery, where the persuader, in a spirit of conquest, entices the listener into wrong decision-making; physical or psychological force, where the participants are forced, through guilt, to do something they would otherwise reject; one-way communication, where the listener is not permitted to respond; and legalism, where the motivation for persuasion is a sense of duty. The paper asserts that the ethical religious persuader does not reduce the choice options of the audience. Rather, it is essential that love for the cause be tempered, at all times, by an attitude of justice toward the listener. (MAI)

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MAXIMIZING CHOICE

AN ETHIC FOR THE RELIGIOUS PERSUADER

by

Emory A. Griffin
Wheaton College

Presented at the Religious Speech Communication Association Convention, Washington D.C., 1977

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The title of this paper could be a bit misleading. It may cause the reader to anticipate an evenhanded analysis of the persuasive practices found in the world's major religions--Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Christianity for starters. If so, I have raised a false expectation.

I am a Christian. The ethical foundations I lay in the following pages have sprung from a commitment to the tenets of historical Christianity. The scriptural evidence I cite reflects my trust in the Bible as an authoratative guide to faith and practice. However, I believe that the ethical framework I sketch in this paper transcends a parochial view. For this reason I ask the indulgence of the reader who does not share my Christian world view. Whenever I support my case with evidence drawn from Christian literature, I encourage you to review your own tradition to see if the principles I present are consonent with those beliefs. As I analyse specific techniques of Christian influence, search your experience for parallel practices. Since the study of ethics is a pecularly human endeavor, any ethical system which outlines responsibilities involved in religious influence should be pan-human in application.

Many religious enthusiasts automatically assume that any method which draws a person into their fellowship is moral. In a discussion of ethics they will defend a particular type of religious persuasion by appealing to the fact that it works. One student in my persuasion class stated this view boldly: "I don't care what the method is as long as it brings pepple to Jesus Christ. If it works, it's O.K. Being a Christian is so vastly more important than anything else that the end justifies almost any means." He was echoing the feelings of many Christians who assume that any method of religious influence is good if it has positive results. I challenge that assumption!

The Bible has much to say about attempts at influence apart from their success or failure. The entire second chapter of First Thessalonians is concerned with the ethics of persuasion. Specifically, Paul says:

> For our appeal does not spring from error or uncleanness, nor is it made with guile; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never used words of flattery, as

> you know, or a cloak for greed, as God is witness; nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children. So being affectionately desirious of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. us. (1 Thes. 2:3-8)

I want to be careful not to overstate the distinction between moral methods of persuasion and effective ones. They're obviously related.. When Paul lays down the qualifications for effective leadership in the Church, he stresses moral purity as the essential criterion. (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1) It's quite possible that in God's economy being ethical and being effective are one and the same. The problem is, however, that due to our finite nature, we don't always have a cosmic view as to when the results of our persuasion are positive. We are often satisfied when our influence occasions outward signs of devotion toward God. "... The Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart ...." (1 Sam 16:7) We are easily impressed by immediate result, whereas God not only takes the long run view, he can also see the unintended side effects which we miss. Therefore, we're on shaky ground when we try to defend the rightness of our methods with a clouded view of their results. As ambassadors for Christ, we need to have an ethical standard which guides our appeal regardless of how people respond.

The rest of this paper will be an attempt to develop an ethic of religious persuasion. By its conclusion, I will have praised or condemned a number of persuasive approaches and techniques. Before considering specific cases, however, we need to determine the ethical principles which will allow us to make moral judgments later on.

RESPONSIBILITY

Any serious attempt at Christian ethics must first answer the question of the nature of man. What are we? How do we differ from the animals? What did God make us to be? The answer to this type of question will shape our ethics of behavior. We should act like humans, not animals. Whatever God intended that we be, we should behave so that other men can be that also.

What then is the unique nature of man? The Biblical witness cries out loud and clear; Man is <u>responsible</u>. The responsibility of man is central to each of the three great themes of the Bible--Creation,

Sin, and Redemption. In Creation, God made man responsible. He is placed in the garden and given the responsibility to till it and keep it. He is given dominion over all other living things. He is responsible to name each of the animals. And most importantly, he is responsible not to eat of the tree of good and evil. In all of these ways man is created accountable.

> In the Christian doctrine of man we are concerned with the true knowledge of responsible existence. One who has understood the nature of responsibility has understood the nature of man. Responsibility is not an attribute, it is the 'substance' of human existence.[1]

The centrality of human responsibility is clearly revealed in the Fall. Adam eats of the tree. When God finds him hiding in the garden Adam tries to shift responsibility to Eve. Eve in turn disowns responsibility and blames the serpent. But God will have none of it. He has created man responsible. Nor will it do to blame Adam for our sin. In Romans 3 Paul makes it clear that we are accountable for our own enthusiastic participation in sin. Emil Brunner sums up the situation:

> Whether he will or no man must always answer for himself. Even if he evades his responsibility, even if he throws responsibility on to the shoulders of other people, even when he says, 'I do not know what the situation is--' yet it is he himself who speaks thus; and in the Judgment he himself will have to bear the responsibility for this decision. No one can escape from his responsibility, not even when he denies it. His denial of responsibility is a responsible action; it is 'up to him' to see whether he can really be responsible for it! Man must take a position, and he does so even when he refuses to take one. Even his refusal is his position.[2]

The third great theme of the Christian faith--Redemption--highlights man's responsibility. God in Jesus Christ has shown his love for man on the cross. Redemption is not automatic, however. Man has the obligation to respond in obedience to God's love. He is responsible to help transform the world. We see, therefore, that responsibility is the major tenet of human existence. As Brunner says:

> This 'thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not' is not something added externally to human existence; it constitutes the heart of man's being. Man's being is inseparable from his sense of obligation.[3] If responsibility be eliminated the whole meaning of human existence disappears.[4]

CHOICE

Responsibility is a broad term that is open to many possible interpretations. In order to develop an ethical approach to persuasion we need to be more specific about the content of man's responsibility. What is he responsible to do?

First and foremost man is responsible to choose. Now it's true there are other components to man's responsibility, but choice is the one that is pertinent to an ethic of persuasion. It's also true that man's responsibility is not fulfilled by merely choosing. He is responsible for the direction of his choice, and I'll discuss this added dimension later in the chapter. But in any act of interpersonal influence the central feature of human existence is man's responsibility to choose. Animals don't have this obligation. God has made them to be directed merely by their instincts and to react uncritically to their environment. Man doesn't have that option. God has made us capable of choice. We have volition. Many times each day we must decide.

> That element of deliberate volition which determines the ends and purposes for which man lives is never absent from human life, and it is this which gives to our life its distinctiveness and its specifically human character.[5]

The call for decision runs consistently through the teachings of our Lord. He says, "Follow me. Love me. He who is not for me is against me." The rich young ruler must decide whether to follow Jesus or money. In Luke 9 Jesus confronts a succession of people who must decide whether or not to throw in their lot with him. Is it worth it to them to leave a comfortable bed, parents or friends? They must choose. God did not create them as robots to be directed by the push of a button.

The scientific literature on robots recognises that choice is a human function. In his article, "The Complete Robot: A Prolegamena to Androidology," Scriven postulates two criteria for calling a robot "human."[6] The performance criterion is met when a robot acts as if it is making a choice. The personality criterion is more stringent. It is fulfilled only if a robot actually does make a choice. To be human is to choose.

In order to choose, and thus be responsible, man must be at least moderately free. Theologians, philosophers and psychologists have proclaimed that it is so--man is free. The medieval Catholic theologian, Pico Della Mirandola, stated categorically that man,

unlike the brute, is free. "O great liberality of God the Father! O great and wonderful happiness of man! It is given him to have that which he chooses and to be that which he wills."[7] Reinhold Niebuhr sees man as free because he can do what no animal can--he can get outside himself and imagine himself acting differently than he is.

> Man is self determining not only in the sense that he transcends natural process in such a way as to be able to choose between various alternatives presented to him by the processes of nature but also in the sense that he transcends himself in such a way that he must choose his total end. In this task of self-determination he is confronted with endless potentialities and he can set no limit to what he ought to be, short of the character of ultimate reality.[8]

The evangelical theologian, E. J. Carnell, takes a similar stance as Niebuhr.

> While it is true that both man and the brute share self-preservation, and thus both seek for values which stabilize well-being, only man has the power of reflecting about reflection, thinking about thought. In short, man is free. Whereas the lower animal remains relatively content within the framework of zones laid down by nature, man complements his natural necessity through free, creative activity.[9]

The Christian psychologist, Paul Tournier, sees man as having much in common with animal life. We share bodily limitations, instincts, habits--in short all that has become automatic and routine. But to the person also belongs free choice, and it is precisely this freedom that makes him human.[10]

Some who contemplate the nature of man object to the claim that man is free to choose. They claim that man is nothing but the result of biological, psychological and sociological conditions, or the product of heredity and environment. Among current thinkers, B. F. Skinner is best known. Skinner holds that autonomous man is a myth.[11] All of man's so called "decisions" are actually determined by previous experience. Despite Skinner's denial, the underlying image is that of a well oiled machine in a mechanistic universe. Even some Christians believe that all of men's actions are determined by God, and that they have no free choice.

Such a view of man must be met head on. If free choice is a myth, so is moral obligation. C. S. Lewis notes that a deterministic view brings about the abolition of man. In an impassioned plea he argues that you cannot strip men of autonomy without denuding them of responsibility.

> In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.[12]

Simone De Beauvoir, the French existentialist echoes Lewis' view. If a man has no free choice, he is not man. When a man acts as if he had no free choice, Beauvoir calls him a "sub-man", and holds him in contempt.[13] Langdon Gilkey claims that in reality every man, whatever his philosophy of behavior, assumes that he and his friends are free. This is natural, for only where freedom and so the power of decision are assumed, does an action become meaningful to itself or to others as a human action.[14]

This is not to say that human choice is capricious or that there are no reasons for our decisions. I just received a phone call from a friend asking me to play tennis. I decided to stay in my office to write rather than go to the court--a rather uncharacteristic decision for me. A number of factors guided my choice: a love of tennis, enjoyment of competition, a feeling of guilt that this chapter is long overdue, a slightly twisted right knee, the knowledge that my wife is taking care of our kids so I can be free to write, etc. People who know me well might be able to predict my decisions with a high degree of accuracy. In this case my friend did! As he made his offer he said, "I know you'll probably end up deciding to write, but how 'bout..." Prediction, however, is not determinacy. Even though my behavior had recognizable parameters and even causes, I was able to select which factors would predominate. I can freely decide how I'll weight each variable, and whether I'll heed some and ignore others. Next time I may play tennis!

We must also recognize that freedom of choice is not absolute. Men are victims as well as subjects. The Viennese psychotherapist, Victor Frankl states this clearly.

> To be sure, a human being is a finite being, and his freedom is restricted. It is not a freedom from conditions, but freedom to take a stand toward conditions.[15] Certainly man is free, but he is not floating freely in airless space. He is always surrounded by a host of restrictions. These restrictions, however, are the jumping-off points for his freedom.[16]

Frankl knows whereof he speaks. He was one of the few men to live through the Auschwitz death camp during the Nazi reign. Even during his confinement he continued to claim that man has a range of choice, however limited. It was on the basis of this experience that he developed the school of logotherapy which sees in responsibleness the very essence of human existence.

I am now about to state what I believe to be the main principle in a Christian ethic of persuasion. But first let me sum up the discussion so far. God has created man responsible . Responsibleness is the central feature of human nature. This means that at each decision point of life man has the God given mandate to make a choice. God not only allows man to freely choose, he requires it. As I stated previously, responsibleness involes more than just choice. Without free choice, however, there is no responsibility. This is clearly seen by Frankl. "Either man's freedom of decision for or against God, as well as for or against man, must be recognised, or else religion is a delusion."[17]

It seems to me that the implication of man's responsibleness for an ethic of persuasion is clear. Any persuasive effort which restricts another's freedom to choose is wrong. Put another way, persuasion is unethical when it reduces the choice options of the individual. Or again, a persuasive technique is immoral if it treats man as less than the responsible human being he is.

We can see the validity of this standard by taking a look at the persuasive tactics which make us mad. In any such discussion the term "manipuplation" quickly arises. We don't like to be manipulated! While we may differ as to the specific techniques which arouse our judicial ire at being conned, had, suckered, etc., we find that in all of them our free choice has been compromised. We've been manipulated and we don't like it.

The Golden Rule says, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Since we don't like others manipulating us, we must act so as not to remove free choice from them. "The freedom of other men must be respected and they must be helped to free themselves."[18] "To will oneself free is also to will others free."[19]

But is freedom of choice really all that important? Isn't salvation so crucial that freedom of choice becomes secondary? Doesn't the end of bringing a person to Christ justify an occasional infringment on his humanness? No!!! God values human choice so much that he will let people go to Hell rather than to violate their integrity. He did not create us as automatons. He meant for us to be responsible for all of our decisions, including whether or not to follow Him. Love requires free choice. A person cannot be saved without freely choosing. Man must be free to choose "not God." Jesus let the rich young ruler walk away. The principle still stands: Any persuasive effort which restricts another's freedom to choose is unethical.

LOVE AND JUSTICE

I noted earlier that man's responsibility consists of more than just an obligation to choose. It is an obligation to choose toward. All choices are not equally good. The full responsibility of man is to make choices in a direction--choices toward God and man. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matt. 22:37-39)

To choose toward God means to choose His will. Christian ethical thinkers have usually seen this as involving two requirements. Helmut Thielicke calls them Gospel and Law.[20] William Frankena calls them Beneficence and Justice.[21] Others have termed them the Love mandate and the Legal mandate or Grace and Law. I will use the terms Love and Justice in the rest of the chapter. To choose toward man means to act toward others in the ways of God--love and justice. Note that these two requirements are central in the man-man relationship set forth in the well known passage from Micah.

> He has showed you, O man, what is good;
> and what does the Lord require of you
> but to do justice, and to love kindness,
> and to walk humbly with your God.
> (Micah 6:8)

Love is concerned with the consequences of an act upon the other person.* The loving persuader cares about the good or bad that comes from his influence. Because he cares about the other person as a person, he tries to figure out ahead of time what will happen as a result of his action in order that he might bring about the most good possible for the other. To answer the question, "What is the loving thing to do?", a persuader must make value judgments as to the relative worth of various results.

Justice is concerned with universal obligations--the oughts of life. The just persuader cares about the rightness or wrongness of his attempts of influence. "Is it ever right to lie?" or "Is it wrong to use emotional appeals?" are questions of justice. If we come to the conclusion that the end doesn't justify the means, we are doing so by an appeal to justice--not love. To answer the question, "What is the just thing to do?", a persuader must look to universal rules of conduct such as "Thou shalt not bear false witness."

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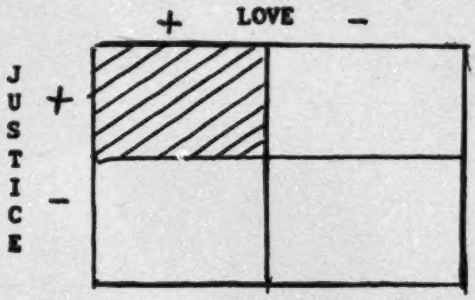
* The reader familiar with ethical theory will recognize that the ethic of love raises teleological questions, whereas justice is concerned with deontological issues.

The ethical man who chooses toward God and man needs both the standards of love and justice. Love without justice leads to an over sentimentalized situation ethics where nothing can ever be judged wrong. Justice without love leads to a legalistic ethic which loses sight of what happens to the other person.

There are times when the dictates of law and the dictates of love conflict. Law demands that Rahab the prostitute not lie to the king of Jericho about hiding Joshua's spies. (Joshua 2) Love demands that she protect the wellbeing of her own family and Joshua's men. Sometimes the best we can do is to choose the lesser of two evils and fall down on our knees to ask forgiveness. In this case the law of justice is overruled by the claims of love. Rahab obviously made the best decision possible because she is praised as one of the heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11. Love does not always supersede justice, however. Part of the tragedy of a tragic moral choice is the very real anguish of decision. But then the Bible never claimed that ethical decisions would be easy.

Therefore, the Christian persuader must choose toward both justice and love in seeking to point others toward Jesus Christ. It is possible to be loving but unjust. It is equally possible to be just but unloving. As depicted by the shaded area in the diagram below, the Christian advocate is called by God to be both loving and just.



The writer of Proverbs speaks with wonder at the "way of a man with a maiden." (Proverbs 30:19) The image which comes to my mind is of the sincere lover tenderly wooing the affections of the undecided young girl. This is the ethical Christian persuader. He lovingly pleads his case while carefully respecting the rights of his beloved.*

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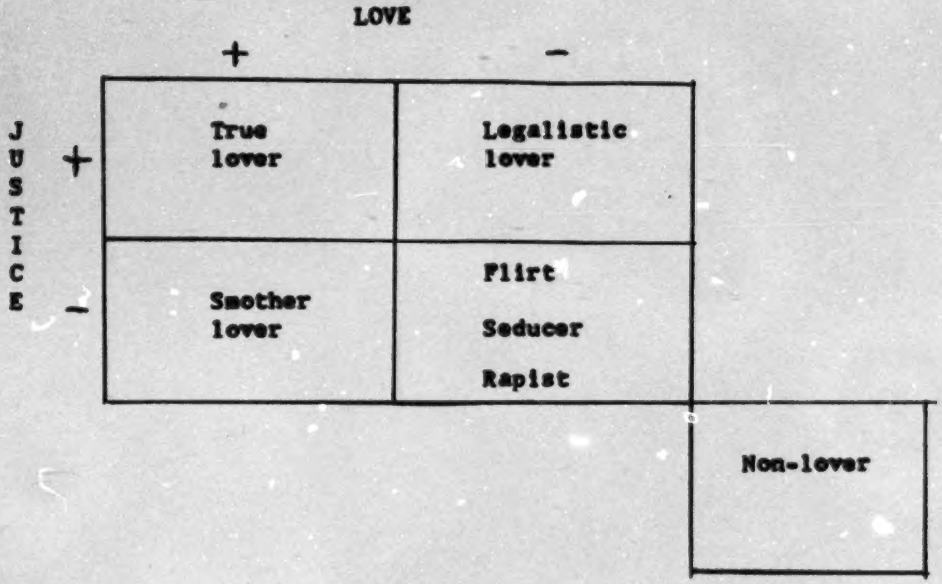
* This is not a new concept. In the Phaedrus, Plato speaks of the rhetorician as lover.[22] Kierkegaard uses the analogy to describe the Christian persuader in his Philosophical Fragments.[23]

The problem is, of course, that not all lovers are loving or just. There are false lovers as well as true lovers. I would like to use the analogy of the false lover to look at some typical ethical abuses in Christian persuasion. The diagram below charts the various types of lovers in regard to their concern for love and justice. As we look at each category of false lover, we will find that his shortcomings involve the removal of free choice to respond to Jesus Christ. This is immoral because true love is not coerced, it is freely given.



THE NON-LOVER

The non-lover is he who does not try to persuade. At first blush this looks like an attractive option, for the non-lover avoids all of the manipulative excesses entered into by the false lover. Live and let live is the non-lover's motto.

> I do my thing, and you do your thing.
> I am not in this world to live up to
> your expectations, and you are
> not in this world to live up to mine.[24]

The detached stance, however, is a luxury unavailable to the Christian. He takes seriously the right of each individual to choose, and he desires that God's way be a live option for every man. Without his persuasive effort another might not be free to choose for Christ. He knows that no man is an island, and that to decide not to influence is to decide to let others' influence hold sway. The non-lover has

opted out; he has left the field. He is, perhaps, more unethical than the false lover because he has shown that he doesn't care about his own beliefs or the other person.

Martin Luther King, Jr. promoted a 1965 human rights rally with the slogan, "If you care, you'll be there." This is God's message for the non-lover. In regard to Christian influence, it is better to have loved and lost, than not to have loved at all. To those who are contemplating the possibility of being a non-persuader, Paul queries:

> But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a (lover)? (Romans 10:14-15)

THE FLIRT

The flirtatious lover is not in love with another person. He is in love with himself, or in love with love. He is out to make as many conquests as he can get. The Christian flirt is the evangelist who is more concerned about getting another scalp for his belt than he is for the welfare of his hearer. He sees people merely as souls. An emphasis on numbers often indicates a flirtatious tendency. The numbers may signify the great throng who attended a rally, the many souls won, or the multitude of followers collected by a charismatic leader. The 1974 International Congress on World Evangelization has confessed in its Lausanne Covenant that evangelicals have "become preoccupied with statistics."[25] The emphasis here is on success and not on the person whom Christ calls us to serve.

We often smile at the puppy love antics of the flirt, but the injustice of his "love them and leave them" tactics can cause longlasting scars. The flirtatious Christian persuader often lavishes attention upon a prospective convert until that individual makes a decision for Christ. Then flushed with the success of obtaining a new trophy of grace, he moves on to new conquests, neglecting the one whom he so recently favored. This is immoral! Throughout his letters Paul stresses the importance of growing to maturity in Jesus Christ. He backed up these words by spending three months in Greece, eighteen months in Corinth, and over two years in Ephesus. When he was apart from them he wrote letters, sent other brethren, and remembered them in his prayers. The loving persuader will avoid the hit and run tactics of the flirt.

THE SEDUCER

The seducer uses deception and flattery to entice the other person into submission. He often appeals to irrelevent desires for success, money, popularity or an easy life in order to accomplish his ends. He's willing to shade the truth because he fears that reality will put a damper on the other person's response. In his book, The Seduction of the Spirit, Harvey Cox claims that these practices are widespread in Christian witness.[26] I'm afraid he's right.

The "testimony" has become a mainstay of Christian persuasion. The typical testimony is told by the successful businessman, beauty queen or sports hero. The story line usually consists of how rotten things were, of becoming a Christian, and of how great things are now. This is devious because it suggests that all these good things will come to the listener if he turns to Jesus. It's similar to the deception of TV commercials which promise sex appeal from a tooth paste, popularity from a mouthwash, or the undying love of your husband if you serve the right brand of coffee.

The Gospel does not promise these things. In fact, the weight of scripture suggests that we shouldn't anticipate the world's honors and goods as a result of our faith. It's also unrealistic (and unjust) to promise that "Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before." Just once I'd like to hear a Christian testify that he had been president of I.B.M., an Olympic medal winner, or a rock star, and that it had been great. He had given his life to Christ and was trying to live up to the Lord's teachings. As a result he had lost his money, fame, or ability and was now having a tough time--but that he praised the Lord anyhow.

The religious seducer is immoral because he maneuvers the listener into making a decision for the wrong reasons. He may do this by presenting only part of the Gospel. Perhaps he portrays the strictness of God's law without stressing the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. Or he might emphasize the glories of personal salvation without mentioning the Gospel's demands for social justice.

Another way to encourage the right decision for the wrong reason is to pair Christianity with something attractive to the listener. Americanism, the youth culture, or even the messenger himself have often been used to appeal to persons who would otherwise have no interest in being associated with the faith. This latter practice is one that deeply troubled Sören Kierkegaard. If the messenger is irresistably attractive, others may respond to his winsome personality, not the Gospel. This danger led Kierkegaard to advise that the

Christian witness not try to persuade in the normal sense, but to merely explain the basics of the faith when asked--to give an account of the hope within. In this way the listener

> is indeed helped, because the question at issue is clarified for him. But he is not coddled or tricked or allured, and the responsibility for a choice remains with him, there being no authority to influence his decision by the intrusion of an alien prestige.[27]

Soliciting money can easily be the act of the seducer. A prime example of this could recently be seen in the movie "Marjoe." The film showed the boy evangelist, Marjoe Gortner, presenting a Jesus that he himself denied in order to collect money. There are less gross but equally disturbing examples among sincere Christians. I question the ethics of overcharging for the expenses of a Christian growth seminar and subsequently spending the excess money for a different purpose. The practice used by many radio ministers of offering special gifts to entice contributions seems equally seductive.

The apostle Paul did not need to pander to people's baser desires, pretend that he was taking a survey, or in any other devious way sneak up on an unsuspecting "victim."

> We use no hocus-pocus, no clever tricks, no dishonest manipulation of the Word of God. We speak the plain truth... For it is Christ Jesus as Lord whom we preach, not ourselves; we are your servants for Jesus sake... This priceless treasure we hold, so to speak, in a common earthenware jar--to show that the splendid power of it belongs to God and not us. (2 Cor. 4:2-7 Phillips)

THE RAPIST

In our look at the unloving and unjust persuader we have seen first the flirt, then the seducer, and now finally the rapist. It does seem that there is an increasing disregard for the other person's free choice in these three types. The flirt is immature--we look on him with some pity. The seducer is immoral--we condemn him. The rapist is criminal--we remove him from society.

Rape is an act of force. There is no other term which so accurately describes some types of religious coercion. Before his conversion, Saul sought to drag Christians out of the Damascus synagogues in order to bring them back to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1) This sounds

quite similar to the kidnapping activities of Ted Patrick, an evangelical minister. Until recently (he now faces a prison term) Patrick would physically abduct young men and women who had left their original Biblical faith to join an autocratic cult or sect. Often with the encouragement and help of his parents, the victim would be held captive while he was "deprogrammed."[28] One gets the disconcerting impression that many Christians would use force to impose their will if only they were part of a powerful ruling majority. The history of torture perpetuated by the Jesuit missionaries and the whole Inquisition are cases in point.

Force can be psychological as well as physical. Any time one "makes you an offer you couldn't refuse," it's rape. Highly charged emotional situations fit this category, for they render the participant virtually helpless to resist the suggestion of the leader.[29] There is nothing wrong with emotion. God made us emotional beings and personal involvement is a vital part of apprehending truth. But crowded revivals singing seventeen choruses of "Just As I Am" or late night campfire say-so meetings can remove the element of conscious choice. Franklin Haiman contends that it's wrong to use any persuasive technique which short circuits the rational decision making faculties.[30]

I believe that there's a special danger inherent for those who work with kids. Historically, many Christian clubs and camps have used high pressure tactics to obtain a decision for Christ. The average pre-adolescent is not equipped to withstand the positive incentive of counselor approval or the negative force of group condemnation. The phrase "age of consent" in our legal code points to the fact that children may be unable to say no to the forceful persuader. Jesus made it clear that leading a child astray is a particularly heinous act. I think this applies to the methods used as well as the intended results.

Probably the most widespread persuasive tactic used in the church is guilt. Undoubtedly this is due to the fact that it's so easy to make people feel guilty if they don't teach a Sunday School class, serve on a committee, tithe ten percent, witness for Christ, or you name it. Those who are somewhat insensitive won't cave in under the pressure, but will feel bad and unworthy. Those with more acute consciences will be unable to withstand the pangs. They'll end up doing something they would have otherwise rejected, accompanied by a gnawing bitterness at being had. Either way it's rape.

THE SMOTHER LOVER

The smother lover loves you to death. He loves you so much that he won't take no for an answer. We often think of unrequited love as an act of beauty and devotion, but his persistence in the face of a clear cut rejection is unjust and can be downright obnoxious.

The smother's injustice lies in his refusal to respect the free choice of another human. I once heard a personal evangelist who said he started out every conversation on an airplane with the question, "Are you interested in spiritual things?" Usually the other person would respond with a somewhat tentative yes, and the evangelist would feel free to go into his planned presentation. If the other person said no, however, the evangelist was undaunted. He'd say, "That's strange. Most people are. Here's the reason why..," and he'd be off on the same thirty minute presentation as before. Recently the U. S. Supreme Court ruled that citizens have the civil right to freedom from invasion of privacy. As Christians we should grant a similar right to those who have indicated that they couldn't care less about our faith.

A Christian leader will often smother his followers by not giving them enough room to breathe. By this I mean a pattern of paternalistic rules and regulations which reflect the leader's conviction that he knows what's best. His love for his people is genuine, but he's afraid they'll go astray, so he lays down one set program for maturing in the faith. He often tries to limit them from hearing other points of view.

This unitary approach to discipleship fails to take into account the vast differences of personality and needs among people. It is unjust because it treats everyone identically, ignoring the uniqueness of each human being. Harvey Cox is severely critical of religious persuasion which involves only one way communication.

> One way 'communication' by decree, fiat or promulgation is viewed by the Bible as the style not of prophets but of tyrants and oppressors. In the New Testament the apostles speak in synagogues and public places. They expose themselves to danger and rejection as well as to authentic acceptance.[31]

He asserts that every man needs to tell his individual story of response to God. "To be a man, man must say his word."[32] Videotaped lectures radio-TV broadcasts, or any other impersonal means which leave no room for spontaneous effective response, can be dehumanizing.

The smotherer means well. But can we ethically justify our actions on the basis of good intentions? To some extent, yes. The other day my son, Jim, climbed into my lap while I was watching TV. In the process he placed his knee painfully in my stomach. As I groaned he said, "Sorry Dad, I didn't mean to." I knew that, and the physical hurt was more than offset by my pleasure at his desire to cuddle together. But suppose he did it again fifteen minutes later, and again after that? I think that I'd be justifiably vexed at his casual unconcern for my welfare. This illustrates the moral obligation which we have as Christian persuaders to monitor the actual consequences of our actions. I believe that the more we limit the choice of another person, the greater the responsibility we must bear for his life. James warns us, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness." (James 3:1)

THE LEGALISTIC LOVER

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." (1 Cor. 13:1) The legalistic lover lacks love. He persuades purely out of a sense of obligation or duty. He is the preacher who presents the weekly altar call even though there's not an unbeliever in the congregation. He is the feeble hearted lover, and others can spot that he's only going through the motions. The legalistic lover is an ineffective persuader, but more to the point of this chapter, the legalist is unethical.

In his classic book, I and Thou, Martin Buber stresses the immorality of treating a person as only a means to an end--a thing or an it. Buber reminds us that it is not enough just to love God. We must love man as well.

> One cannot divide one's life between an actual relationship to God and an inactual I-It relationship to the world--praying to God in truth and utilizing the world. Whoever knows the world as something to be utilized knows God the same way.[33]

The legalistic persuader refuses to look at the total needs of man. While presenting the words of personal salvation, he chooses to ignore the very real human needs for food, peace, dignity or accomplishment. James has a scathing denunciation of such loveless persuasion.

> If a fellow man or woman has no clothes to wear and nothing to eat, and one of you say, 'Good luck to you. I hope you'll keep warm and find enough to eat,' and yet give them nothing to meet their physical needs, what on earth is the good of that? (James 2:16 Phillips)

THE TRUE LOVER

The true lover is he who is both loving and just. He is the persuader who cares more about the welfare of the other person than he does about his own ego. He makes his appeal in a manner that respects the human rights of other people. Although saddened, he's willing to let the other person say no. The passage from First Thessalonians on page one of this chapter presents a picture of Paul as the true lover.

It's hard to cite a contemporary example who fulfills all of the requirements of the true lover. I must confess that I spot myself more easily in the false lover categories than in this one. I have flirted with other people's affections, being more concerned that they succumb to the faith than I was in providing long lasting nurture. I have allowed them to be seduced into believing that becoming a Christian will make them popular. Nor is rape a stranger. I have at times played to the emotions of others to the point where I doubt their ability to think clearly. I've smothered people by accepting only a specific word formula as evidence of their faith, and I have at times shown such a legalistic lack of love for another that I would witness to him without even bothering to learn his name.

Thank God that he is willing to forgive me for this unethical behavior--and all others like myself. He may even have used our actions to further His will. But this is no excuse for us to continue immoral practices. We can use our Lord Jesus Christ as a model of what our behavior should be. I'm impressed by the beautiful mix of justice and love which he achieved with the Samaritan woman at the well. (John 4) He justly told her the truth about her errors in morals and theology, but he did so in a loving way which spared her needless embarrassment. Notice that he seems to have sent the disciples away to get food so that he could be alone to talk with her. It's doubtful that such a personal conversation would have taken place in a crowd. It's probably the only time in history that twelve people went to get food for thirteen-or fourteen, for surely Jesus would have met her physical needs as well.

Christ shows the same regard for people in other encounters recorded in John's Gospel. He is willing to see Nicodemus at night so as not to compromise his standing among the Pharisees. He carefully avoids causing further embarrassment to the woman taken in adultery, yet plainly tells her, "Do not sin again." He is responsive to the human needs of the wedding couple at Cana, the man born blind, the hungry multitudes, and the doubting Thomas. He is even willing for many of his disciples to leave him when the demands of the Gospel seem too great. (John 6:66) At all times he is motivated out of real love for the other person and his actions toward him are just. He is truly ethical in his appeal, and strikingly effective. God will use the moral man.

This then is the Christian ethic of persuasion. We must act so as to fulfill the requirement of love and the obligation of justice in seeking to guarantee the human freedom to choose toward God and man. This is a hard standard. But as the evangelical theologian, Helmut Thielicke observes:

> Ethics does not solve problems, it intensifies them by showing what is the point of any particular decision. Its task is that of clarification. It does not seek to spell out precisely what must be done. It simply lays bare the full implications of that 'what,' so that the underlying issue of the particular decision is heard as a claim. Ethics in effect complicates matters by analysing the contents of a decision.[34]

As Christian persuaders, we need to start making some hard decisions.

FOOTNOTES

1. Emil Brunner, Man In Revolt (Philadelphia, 1947), p. 50.
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4. Brunner, p. 258.
5. Brunner, p. 30.
6. Michael Scriven, "The Complete Robot: A Prolegamena to Androidology," in Human and Artificial Intelligence, F. J. Crosson, ed. (New York, 1970), p. 203.
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8. Reinhold Niebuhr, Human Nature (New York, 1957), p. 163.
9. E. J. Carnell, A Philosophy of the Christian Religion (Grand Rapids, 1952), p. 16.
10. Paul Tournier, The Meaning of Persons (New York, 1957), pp. 93-97.
11. B. F. Skinner, Beyond Freedom and Dignity (Toronto, 1971), pp. 175-201.
12. C. S. Lewis, The Abolition of Man (New York, 1947), p. 35.
13. Simone De Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity (New York, 1948), p. 43.
14. Langdon Gilkey, Maker of Heaven and Earth (Garder City, N. Y., 1965), p. 74.
15. Victor Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning (Richmond, 1965), p. 205.
16. Victor Frankl, The Doctor and the Soul (New York, 1960), p. 86.
17. Frankl, Man's..., p. 209.
18. Beauvoir, p. 60.
19. Beauvoir, p. 73.
20. Helmut Thielicke, Theological Ethics, Vol. 1: Foundations (London, 1966), pp. 94-124.

FOOTNOTES (continued)

21. William Frankena, Ethics (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1970), p. 43.

22. Plato, Phaedus (Indianapolis, 1956), pp. 7-42.

23. Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments, trans. David Swenson (Princeton, N.J., 1948), p. 20.

24. Frits Perls, "Gestalt Prayer"

25. Time, August 5, 1974, p. 50

26. Harvey Cox, The Seduction of the Spirit (New York, 1973), p. 118.

27. David Swenson, Preface to Philosophical Fragments, xvii.

28. "Kidnaping for Christ," Time, March 12, 1973, pp. 83-84. "Open Season for Deprogrammers," Christianity Today, August 31, 1973, pp. 40-41.

29. William Sargant, Battle for the Mind (Baltimore, 1961), p. 74.

30. Franklyn Haiman, "Democratic Ethics and the Hidden Persuaders," Quarterly Journal of Speech XLIV (December, 1958), pp. 385-92.

31. Cox, p. 309.

32. Cox, p. 312.

33. Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, 1970), p. 156.

34. Thielicke, 621.